



AASHA'S STORY

I knew I had to leave when I found he had a mental problem. I knew that he was dangerous. I was six and a half months pregnant and very stressed. I knew I had to protect my baby.

My husband was my immigration sponsor and he stopped supporting me financially. He had another woman. Centrelink assisted me and told me I couldn't stay in that situation.

The Domestic Violence Unit supported me with accommodation which I really appreciated. The educational programs at the DVU were very helpful. I learned about Australian law and the Australian system. This helped me to organise my life and for my little baby. I had nobody in Australia as I came as a bride and lived on a farm 100 km from Adelaide.

I want my son to be a happy person and be different from his father. I want to raise my son to be non-violent.

If I knew of a woman experiencing domestic violence I would tell them they must think of their children first and themselves. If it is not a healthy relationship it will not get better, it will get worse.



BARBARA'S STORY

I left the relationship after yet another blatant lie. How many times can one give a liar the benefit of the doubt? The lies were beginning to affect my mental wellbeing which in turn was beginning to affect my ability to care for my children.

As I was the only parent actually doing the parenting this was a serious concern to me. So I started seeking help. Who would help me? No-one had helped me in the past. I didn't know where to start. After a few phone calls I ended up speaking with someone at a Domestic Violence Shelter. She seemed to know exactly what I had been experiencing.

I got involved in a support group and I found out it was not just me who had suffered abuse and disrespect. Why had no-one ever told me there was help available for me? The knowledge that it is not just me has given me the strength to keep going.

I know there are other women on this journey who have suffered as I have and are finding the courage to keep going, and not only that, to improve their lives and the opportunities for their children.

When you find just one person who recognises your suffering and directs you to where help is available, that is enough. Then you have a tiny bit of strength to continue on the journey step by step.



CATHY'S STORY

I married a man who I thought was the man of my dreams. Life was great but a slow calculated wearing down of my soul had started.

Three years into my marriage I had my first child, then things started to change. Pushing became hitting. The breaking point was when he started to involve our child. The look of fear and the sound of my son screaming "Leave my mummy alone" was it. I knew I had to get out despite all the threats. I felt I'd be dead if I stayed. After several attempts I got out and flew to my sister's house in Perth. The abuse continued once I was back in Adelaide. I was followed and continually harassed.

The support from my sister and friends helped me stay away. The support and education from the Domestic Violence Service has helped me stay strong and able to move on and live again.

Now I am at Uni. My son is doing great. Now people are saying how much better I am and my child and I have changed so much for the better. I'm loving freedom.

If someone in a domestic violence situation asked me what to do I would simply suggest the services that helped me and say that people will believe you.



DAWN'S STORY

I was with my partner for 15 years, the father of my two kids and I loved this man. The relationship was very stormy from the beginning and we had lots of fights. This was normal. When we were good we were very good, but when we were bad we were very bad. The kids came along and life got more stressful. My son hardly slept and was very difficult. My partner drank a lot and the bad times were starting to far outweigh the good times. The putdowns, criticisms, being sworn at, shouted at, being pushed around, being physically and sexually abused were getting more frequent.

It took a friend seeing bruises on my arms to point out that this was domestic violence. I didn't know! My friend gave me the telephone number of the DV shelter and I met with a lady there. She told me that I was in a serious situation and that if and when I was ready to leave I could go to the shelter and that there would be support there. I wasn't ready to leave, I loved him! Then he hit my son and sexually assaulted me. I rang the shelter and they said I could come to the shelter straight away. I left him. This was the hardest thing I have ever done. I was wracked with doubt and guilt and was scared to death.

The support of the shelter and my family and friends has kept me from going back and I have to constantly remind myself of the way he treated me and that it isn't acceptable to be treated in this way and that it isn't my job to make him happy and that it wasn't my fault and that I'm not responsible. Seven months on I still have bad days, I struggle on my own with the kids, but I'm starting to have more good days than bad.



EADITH'S STORY

It was when he denied getting rough with our baby in the car was the thing that made me leave. All he wanted was to take the baby away from me. He wants to control what I am thinking but he can't because I am myself. I've been trapped in this verbally, physically and emotionally abusive relationship cycle for long – long enough where myself and the children are in danger. I've drawn a line for myself that if he is going to do it again, there is no hope for my life and my children.

I then fled and someone saw me running in a dark street. A car was behind me. I was running with fear for my life, thinking I can save myself, I am there to save my children. Someone saw me running and gave me a ride to the police station. I was then helped to be safe and get through to a safe house with my children.

The support of the authorities and Domestic Violence groups helps me hold on to keep going and survive and get myself on my feet again. I wouldn't have now what I have if there wasn't help out there. We're not alone, we can see and learn what life can be.

Life shouldn't be like walking on eggshells but should be free to be happy and safe for all without any abuse from anyone. Everyone deserves for their life to be happy and healthy. There is help there if you want to change. Don't wait until it is too late. Listen to what your self is telling you and what truth you can see. You deserve respect.



FATIMAH'S STORY

I was still at school when my parents arranged my marriage to a 21-year-old man. For years I endured violence and abuse before walking out with our young daughter. This illegal marriage ceremony took place with the full knowledge and involvement of my parents. It is illegal to do this in Australia but common in my community.

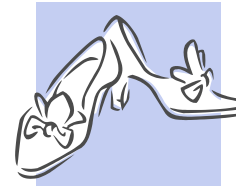
He locked me up and only let me out to go to school. He made sure that I didn't do well at school. He would beat me and tear up my school books if he saw me doing homework. I told a teacher what was happening but he didn't believe me. He just thought I was lazy and making excuses. He didn't report it to the authorities as I later found out he was supposed to. Eventually when I turned 15 he made me leave school. I fell pregnant at age 17 and gave birth to a daughter and my husband said she would be married off as soon as she turned 14.

I was subjected to constant violence, including being kicked, punched, stamped on, thrown into walls and made to have sex whenever he wanted it without my consent. My daughter was also attacked. I told my father but he turned coldly away and said "You're married now. You must do what your husband says. If he's hitting you, you must deserve it. Be a good wife"



GAIL'S STORY

The light bulb went out.
The nerves shook me inside and out.
I scurried like the mouse to get out of the house.
Grabbed my two precious belongings - my two beautiful children.
Quick! Quick!
Only a few essentials and the shoes on my feet – the same ones I wore every day.
I got me back on my feet.
Just like me my time was done and so were the soles of my shoes
And with that their days are done.
But mine have just begun.



HANNAH'S STORY

When he physically abused my son and lied about the event that caused my son physical harm, that was the last straw. I knew if I stayed I would put the safety of my children at risk. It was bad before but it was all I knew. I felt like I was disappearing into a dark hole with no way to escape, like no-one could hear my screams or believe the words I was trying to hide behind my tears. This was the final straw – a reason to get away and protect my children and have a voice that would finally be heard. I grabbed our things and never looked back.

Having support from the women's shelter, and having somewhere to stay, having support from people who have been through similar situations helped me find the strength to be strong and find me again.

I want to let those who have been or are going through this know there is light at the end of the tunnel, that they're not alone and that the biggest thing you can do is say NO.... and taking that big leap and saying NO to all the pain and anger and violence, and staying away. You just need to find those words. Enough is enough.

Now I have found who I am and I know I am nothing like I was before. I am strong, I am beautiful, I am a survivor and my children are safer now than before.



IANTHE'S STORY

As me and my children experienced a horrible nightmare no one could hear the silent cry of pain that we experienced from the abuse that he put us through. He physically abused me and my children more than once and that made us leave after gaining support to assist me to finally have the courage to walk. I packed our bags and had him removed by the police and made my way with the children to a safer place where I knew we would be OK. We were lost, emotionally drained and shaken but I knew that we were safe and in a better place. Leaving gave me the courage and opportunity to make a more positive journey to a better life and I would never now return to the nightmare we experienced. Through leaving abuse behind closed doors my strength and courage has grown stronger due to the love and support of my two lovely children. I look at them every day and they are the reason behind my strength and staying strong. My courage and strength has come through the support of my children and the support of many other women who have experienced violence and abuse. I am proud to say that I am now a stronger woman.

Escape the nightmare go be free
Enjoy your future journey to be
It's not OK and you will see
You're a stronger woman when you're free
So have the courage and strength to see
That you're a better person
Go be free
It's hard to leave this I know
But I finally had the courage to go
So have faith and you will see
That your future journey has set you free.



JANELLE'S STORY

He told me he would hurt me so bad I would never dance again. After he said this I started planning my escape in my mind. Unfortunately at this stage I was completely isolated. It felt like I was trapped in a prison of fear. I gained his trust enough for him to let me leave the house on my own. I went to a supportive friend nursing so many injuries. I still felt trapped. My friend rang the police who were completely unhelpful despite my bruised and battered body. I convinced them to do a risk assessment and left it there. I didn't want to put anyone in danger as I was afraid he would come after me and hurt anyone in his way. Shortly after this I was contacted by a police lady from family investigations and I told her I was fine. She persisted contacting me and told me I needed to see her which I refused. Eventually the police found him and took him into custody. I continued contact with him as I was still under his spell of manipulation. The police woman continued to contact me and I continued to refuse her help. Eventually she was able to convince me to get an intervention order. At first I was upset and angry, and so mad. It was then that the haze started clearing and life became clearer. It was then I realised what I needed to do to survive. When reality hit I made some big changes and cut a lot of ties. I fled from my house and went into a shelter. This was the turning point in where I had the opportunity to get the help I needed. The support was incredible. I attended counselling and I started feeling stronger and stronger. I started believing in myself again. I thought I had lost faith in good until I was surrounded by it. I started to focus on what I am passionate about and used my love and passion to drive me towards self healing.



KAY'S STORY

I am a domestic violence survivor, not a victim a SURVIVOR. I spent ten years living with an emotionally abusive man who had unfathomable rages. He would scream and yell at me and the kids over the smallest things. A shutter would come down over his eyes, veins would stand out in his face and neck, spit would fly from his mouth and he would be purple with rage. His cruel words and put downs frightened me and kept me there but conversely they helped me leave. I knew I needed to go but felt paralysed. He loved me, he needed me. I was the only one who understood him. Then one day he looked at me coldly and with spite said "I've never loved you. I'm only with you because I thought you would be a suitable mother to have the child I wanted." It was meant to hurt me, and while it did, it helped me. I actually physically felt the tie between us snap and in that moment he sent me free. I was gone within two months of those words being spoken.

I have stayed strong after leaving as I'm lucky enough to be surrounded by supportive family and friends. The biggest help though was a full year of counselling and a support group I attended every week. There I was educated about domestic violence and realised I wasn't alone. I have rebuilt my life and am now studying at TAFE full-time.

In five years' time I see myself as happy and healthy and working in Community Services helping others. I would say to any one in a domestic violence situation, "Leave. You deserve better. It won't be easy but it will be better than what you have now. There is so much help out there for you. And speak out, silence is the abuser's best friend. Learn to love yourself again. Their behaviour is not about you, it never was, it is all about them. Be free. Where am I now? The cheeky, sexy, tall, proud girl is back!



LARISSA'S STORY

It was Christmas Day and as I watched his face turning purple with rage as he screamed at me about something inconsequential that he had perceived that I had done to him something in me snapped. I saw his mouth moving but stopped hearing the words – it was as if a veil had come down and I know that if I had stayed a minute longer with this man he would drive me completely crazy.

He never hurt me physically but his devastating rages wore me down and caused massive bruising of my heart and soul. I thought my love would have the power to heal him but I was so wrong. When I look back I think I fell in love with my abusive father. He had so many characteristics of my father and in loving him I was trying to reclaim the love from my father that I never received when I was a child. We separated for good on that Christmas Day and it was as if a big, heavy, wet blanket had been lifted from my shoulders. In fact I felt so good I felt guilty.

Today I would say to anyone experiencing domestic violence that it is not only the physical abuse that hurts – sometimes the emotional abuse can be more damaging because the pain and hurt is invisible because it's on the inside and no-one can see it. Leave – because real love will help you grow and thrive – men who perpetrate domestic violence have real problems that only they can fix – no matter how much you love them and try to help them it won't work because they have to recognise that they have the problem.



MARIA'S STORY

It was his birthday, just a normal day really. We had finished dinner, hardly speaking as usual, when the phone rang. I was invited to a friend's house, it was her birthday too and her parents had organised a BBQ. My daughter and I hopped in the car and drove over. I stayed only a few minutes and then drove home.

When I reached the front door he was standing there waiting for me, his face grey and his eyes angry. I was surprised to see tears in his eyes. I wasn't used to seeing him cry – usually that angry look meant I was going to get a beating or a kicking. He'd been taking anti-depressants but he didn't think they were working so he had taken double the prescribed dose. His behaviour was now unpredictable. After years of beatings I had learnt to recognise the signs indicating I would be attacked at any moment – but under medication things had changed and he was worse than ever. He demanded to know why I had gone out on his birthday. I tried to explain that I had only been gone 20 minutes and I had returned as quickly as I could, but he was not satisfied. He accused me of not loving him and he insisted I was having an affair.

I must have had a death wish that day because instead of taking cover and curling up in a ball as I had done so many times before, I tore up his birthday card and said "No I don't love you – I am not having an affair, but if I could find someone who really loved me I would." He looked at me in disbelief and then grabbed me tightly with both hands around my neck.

He pushed his thumbs into my throat until everything around me started to darken. I thought this was the end but he suddenly stopped

and I fell to the floor. He then dragged me upstairs. He pulled me into the bathroom and held my head against the tap, threatening to smash my head on it unless I said I had lied and I did really love him. As soon as I complied with this demand he dragged me into the bedroom and said "Let's see how much you love me" and forced me to have sex with him. He later made me go to the BBQ with him to collect our daughter making many threats on the way as to what he would do to me and our daughter if I told anyone what had happened. When she got into the car he told her that we had been talking and had decided to have another baby. She was so excited but I felt sick.

That evening when she had gone to bed we were in the kitchen he was acting as if nothing had happened and was talking positively about having a baby. My blood was boiling and I grabbed the kitchen knife. I came so close to stabbing him but my thoughts turned to my 10 year old daughter. I couldn't leave her with one dead parent and one in prison. She had suffered so much already witnessing so much violence. I couldn't put her through losing both parents.

The next morning he was happy stroking my hair and telling me that if I was a good girl I wouldn't get hurt again. He made me promise not to tell anyone. For years I had hidden the truth from my colleagues at work but that day I couldn't do it. I walked into my office and broke down. I told my manager everything and he was very supportive. I went to the police and then collected my daughter and went into hiding.

Many traumatic events followed but I had friends I could talk to. Their support gave me the courage to walk away and ask for help. Life was not easy for some years after but every day was better than the last.



NAOMI'S STORY

The morning I left actually wasn't the 'worst event' that we had, it was just another time he had lost his mind in a rage at 4 am waking us up again. It was just one more time that I woke with him yelling above me inches from my face. He was capable of far worse but, on this morning my daughter got up and bravely tried telling him that this was scaring her again and it was not fair. I watched her frightened but brave face be totally crushed again as he put her back in her place. My youngest was watching as well silent, wide eyed and trembling. That was it. We went to school and never returned after years of abuse.

Since we left we have not looked back. It is hard to do, a leap into the unknown. I had no idea of the services available. There is no doubt in my mind if it was not for the fantastic support we have been given and the genuine care we have been shown I would have caved in and gone back. If that had happened I would have missed watching my daughters become lighter and brighter as they blossomed into the children they actually are instead of the sullen, dark eyed, twitchy children they were. It is wonderful to wake up every day and KNOW that no-one in your home is going to fly into a destructive rage, you're not going to be force fed drugs, nor be physically invaded. It's my children's faces and their happiness combined with the wonderful support that enables me to stay strong and know I have finally done the right thing by us.

If someone asked me my advice around domestic violence I would say "Yes it is hard, it is scary but it's not as scary as the thought of the rest of your life being a victim of violent behaviour. No one deserves to live like that.

LEAVE - LEAVE.



PAULA'S STORY

This person was very similar to my father and his behaviours. I always thought to myself that I would not do that to my children. I could not help him. When I was educated regarding domestic violence I spoke up and gained support. I realised that his behaviour was intolerable, appalling, abusive, threatening and unacceptable. I had forgotten who I was and who I could be.

My children and close family support have kept me strong. I didn't want my son to grow up thinking it was OK to treat females like that. I didn't want my daughter to grow up thinking it's OK to be treated like that. The professionals that have been involved and supported my children and myself have really helped.

It is nearly six years since I left and things are being achieved by myself and my children. I am about to graduate with a diploma after studying full time for two years as a single parent. My children are happy, confident and just amazing people.

A fellow student recently gained the confidence to speak to me re what was going on at home for her. I assured her she wasn't on her own and let her know of available support for women and children in her position. She is now in a new home with her small son away from the abuser.

Always dream big and believe in yourself. You're not on your own.



OLGA'S STORY

There are many myths about domestic violence and who it happens to. One myth is that it only occurs to older women of lower education. Well, I am in my final year at Uni and this year I gained the courage to leave my boyfriend who was a domestic violence offender. Needless to say this was one of the hardest decisions I have ever had to make. Not only did he isolate me from my friends and family, but he also made me believe that I could not move on after him. I believed that in some weird and twisted way I deserved the abuse I was receiving. I was terrified to leave not only because I was in fear of my safety but because I believed him and thought that there would never be a man who would love me again.

At first I just wanted to be single but then the stalking started occurring. I again mustered up the strength within myself to get a restraining order. My ex is not allowed to contact me or come within 500 metres of me. After having this order for less than a week he violated it. With the help of family, friends, and the people at the domestic violence shelter I have been able to use the legal system to protect myself. I will not lead anyone on to say that this process was easy or not stressful because it was literally the hardest thing emotionally I have ever had to do. I will say that the amount of pride and self-confidence I have gained cannot even begin to measure the negative emotions I had during the process.

Although it is not all over I am more than proud to say I have done what was best for me and my safety and there is not a single person on this planet that can or ever will take that away from me. My advice for anyone who is experiencing domestic violence is that there is a way out. No matter how dark the tunnel may be there is

always a light at the end. You can move on, it will be very difficult, but I promise you, if I can do it you can too.

There is help out there for you. There are many domestic violence shelters and support services that are more than willing to help. Lastly, if you are a survivor I encourage you whether or not you think you need it to seek counselling of some sort. I knew that I had been experiencing some stress and anxiety from this relationship but it was not until seeking counselling that I was diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. I had never imagined that was what was going on but now that I know I have been able to treat this disorder.

If you take anything away from this story please take this: domestic violence can happen to any type of person whether they are educated or not, young or old. Most importantly know there is hope no matter how negative your situation may be.



QADIRA'S STORY

I came to Australia to marry a man to whom I had been promised. Our families had made this decision when we were children. I had been to university in my home country and was a fully qualified doctor. He would not allow me out of the house unless he was with me. He beat me for the slightest thing saying it was for my own good and that I must submit to his will. One day when he was out I rang the Domestic Violence Hotline. It took me another six months to leave but now I am free. The saddest thing is that I am now dead to my family.



RACHELLE'S STORY

When he demanded my bank card with all my pay in it two weeks before Christmas I knew it was time to leave. I refused to give it to him. He started yelling and then put our two girls in their cots in their bedroom. I could hear them crying "Mummy, Mummy." He then took a knife out of the drawer in the kitchen and held it against my throat. He told me that if I didn't give the bank card to him he would "slice me open". After about half an hour of us fighting I gave in to him. He said, "You did the right thing."

He left with our oldest daughter and said he would be back soon. As soon as he left I packed some clothes and personal items and cancelled the bank card. I then went to child services and told them what had happened. They helped me get my oldest daughter back and I then went into a High Risk Domestic Violence Shelter. From there I got into contact with my Dad. I hadn't spoken to him for over a year.

As soon as I could I left the state and returned to my family. I have been diagnosed with several mental health problems and have a few physical problems still from the result of domestic violence.

I want to be happy about myself and for my children to have a great relationship with me. I would say to anyone in a domestic violence situation that you're not alone, there are people that will help you and it isn't at all your fault. You can leave because you are strong even though you may not know it. You can do anything if you put your mind to it.



SALLY'S STORY

When I realised that he wasn't going to change I had to be strong and make the change. I knew that my children were unhappy as well and I realised that they deserved a better life. It took me a long time to take the first step and it wasn't easy at first.

When I left I felt relieved and safe and I had the support of counsellor at Centacare. I also had the support of my caseworker and counsellors at the Women's Shelter. I felt like I had lifted a load off my back. I felt so light and free to think, to make my own decisions without being judged and put down in front of my children, and in public.

If I had a friend going through domestic violence I would tell her that she deserves better. Everyone deserves to be treated with respect and dignity by their partners even when they're married. 'Til death do us part' is only relevant when the relationship is functional and everyone is being treated with respect and dignity. I have given this advice to my own daughters so they don't have to go through years of abuse as I did.



TAMARA'S STORY

You haven't destroyed me – I am finally free of your control – you will never change. It took 25 years before I walked out that door. Because of my support group I have the strength to move forward and I am blissfully happy. No longer, in your words, a f...ing useless waste of space". I took that control back and I am empowered.



UALANIE'S STORY

Brave face, false smile, hiding behind your children, the thought of moving forward is an unrealistic dream, MYTH: the devil you know is better than the devil you don't. Being told constantly you're stupid you're an uneducated under achiever, worthless female, the reason woman have small feet is so they can stand closer to the sink. Blackmail... so sick of hearing it... I tried to leave and he kicked my dog's face in...

I tried to leave again and he shot my horse in the head. "Trapped" Searching for relief. Trying to trust friends without them telling their partners your struggle. The partners and your husband are best friends. Always on high alert... Clarity, Positive thoughts, Strengths, Invisible shield to reflect the abuse...The fifth time I'm ready... Deaf... I can't hear him... I don't want to hear him. Protection of the children is my only focus. Packed and leaving. Gone. Never look back, focus, tears, scared, reality, frightened.

You can succeed at this. Life is so much better. You are in control of your life. This is your journey. You are clever, smart, intelligent, wonderful, an inspiration to your children and yourself. Strengths, cards, books you are a doer! Your children admire you and look up to you.

My life's quote now and for the rest of my life is... If the road you're travelling on is bumpy change direction and travel down another road... you are the driver of your car... drive it to happiness!!! Two and a half years later you still think about it... But Life is real we are happy, and enjoying life... LIFE IS FUN.



WANDA'S STORY

I was raised to 'turn the other cheek' and 'to be nice' and to 'behave like a lady'- all messages which ultimately served to embed in me the belief to put my needs last and to feel I had no right to be assertive and to get my needs met. This was, I believe, the breeding ground to be a perfect target for men who like to control women and who place their needs as important and women's needs as irrelevant.

Upon reflection many years later, after relationships where I was taken for granted, threatened, bullied, violated, physically assaulted and cheated on, I realised men who have no respect for women, watch women closely when looking for someone to fulfil their needs. Those women who are sassy or stand their ground or are very confident in themselves and their rights, are given a wide berth by these men. Instead they focus on the ones who have low self-esteem or who are isolated in society for whatever reason or are very naive and trusting.

We must teach and train our young girls to be confident, to believe in themselves, to learn to not settle for less, that being on one's own can be fulfilling and this is better than being in a relationship which diminishes us as human beings and that their needs are just as important as anyone else's, that they have the right to be happy and safe and that they can be. No one has the right to belittle and abuse anyone, physically or psychologically or withdraw basic needs or treat them unequally.



VAL'S STORY

I walked away from family violence eventually but it was my daughter, not my partner who I eventually had the courage to separate from. All through her adolescent years from about age 12 she harassed, bullied threatened and abused me, in many ways. I took it for a long time... after all a mother is supposed to protect her child and I thought that I must have been somehow to blame.

The constant harassment, demands for money, threats to damage property, the thefts of my property, unreasonable use of the phone were relentless. It was a shameful thing to deal with. People didn't understand. For years I suffered in silence feeling alienated and defeated.

The emotional abuse was worst with her belittling me, blaming me for all that went wrong in her life and then demanding that I provide recompense for her 'dreadful' life. I spent many thousands of dollars that I could ill afford trying to provide for her thinking if only she can just 'get on her feet' financially she will be able to be independent but that never happened.

When the grandchildren arrived it was worse. She knew now that she had more leverage as I was concerned about them and she could get more out of me. If I didn't provide the demanded resources; money for food, rent, car registration and repairs, car seats, outings she said I didn't care about them and she told them as much. When I refused to provide additional resources to her she threatened to stop them seeing me and claimed I was a negative influence in their lives.

Eventually, when she was almost 30, after a particularly traumatic outing where, after I had taken her and the children out for a meal for her birthday she abused me, demanded money and told me I would never see the children again. I had finally reached the end of my tether with her.

Finally after 17 years of abuse and violence I made the decision to walk away. I changed my phone number and changed and fortified the locks and felt a freedom I had forgotten. The good news about the grandchildren is that I have since been able to negotiate regular visits with them through their father. I genuinely hope that my daughter one day can come to terms with her issues and develop a positive outlook on life but for now her issues are no longer mine and I am free of violence and abuse in my life.



XANDRA'S STORY

It's 3:30pm and I'm walking away from the school with my 4 year old son and 6 year old daughter. But we have nowhere to walk to; we have no home, no car, and no safety. I have no income, no money in the bank, no cash, no food, nothing but the clothes on our backs.

I do have a father but his wife insists he not help. I have friends but whenever I escape to their homes I put them in danger for he has my address book. My friends are all single parents with young children, as I was before I met MC. My ex, the children's father, is not violent, but he has been told lies by MC and has said that if we end up in the "Battered Wives Refuge", he will take custody.

MC has told me that he will kill me if I go to the doctor or the law, I have reason to believe him, he has thrown me head first down a flight of steps. Luckily for me I hit the wall on the way down, my ribs were broken but I am alive. He never uses his fists, as it would leave evidence; instead he throws me against things - always when the children are in bed, after he has ripped the phone from the wall and blocked my path to the door. He never touches my children. He has also taken the precaution of telling my doctor and some friends that I am psychologically messed up and that I make up stories.

My friend Sue takes me to visit her friend Linda, a first meeting for me and I am humiliated when Sue tells Linda my story. Sue has done this before and I face the question "what are you going to do?" - if I knew of anything I could do, I'd already be doing it, the question just reinforces my feelings of hopelessness. But Linda asks a different question "What do you need" and since I take it as an enquiry not an offer, I say without censorship "I need somewhere to live". Linda tells me to move in, right

now, with my children, she will drive me to pick up clothes. MC does not have her address so I do. We sleep on the floor.

Next I get a job, not easy with such young children, but I apply for a job at a place where I used to volunteer, unbeknown to me they already know what has happened to me, so they make a job especially to suit my skills. Then I go to an organisation that legally squats houses owned by public corporations, there's no power but there is water. They allocate me a place and I walk my children there to set up camp beds on the floor.

But a miracle happens. I'd also been to a legal aid place and they'd said that if I could get a guarantor for the mortgage they could get my house back. When I'd asked my father he'd said no but he did ring my brother. My brother buys MC out of the house and says that I and my children can live there, forever, rent free. When I move back into the house I take lodgers, it helps with income as I furnish the house and clothe the children but most important of all it means there is someone to go for help if MC breaks the door down. So we never had to move into the squat. Within 2 years I have made it back into full-time work at good pay and own a brand new car, within 3 years I have raised a mortgage and so paid back my brother. Within 4 years I have emigrated to Australia.

The last thing was forgiveness, not because he deserved it but because it set me free.



ZABRINA'S STORY

Recently I read the book *Before the Fact* by Frances Iles. Lina the heroine of this book expends a heck of a lot of her time and energy trying to protect her ne'er do well husband Johnny from the consequences of his actions. In the finish Johnny poisons his wife for her money and even then she still protects him. She knows he is going to poison her and writes a suicide note exonerating him from blame.

I could really relate to that. It reminded me of my marriage. Not that my husband ever tried to murder me (that I know of) but over the years he did some pretty awful things to me and I spent a lot of my time and energy protecting him from the consequences of his own actions. I bailed him out of jail, I paid his debts, I lied to people about why I was bruised all over and I believed him when he said that if I just loved him more and believed in him more and stood by him more it would all be different. In other words I believed that it was all my fault and I had to try harder.

One day I just couldn't try any harder. I came home and my teenage son had bruises all down his chest. I demanded to know what happened and my husband looked so guilty that I just knew. Looking back on it I wished I had charged him with assault but at the time I just wanted to get away. He made me feel sick just to look at him. I didn't even hate him he just made me feel sick. My son kept telling me 'leave it'.

I don't think he ever thought I would leave his dad. I'd left many times before but I'd always come back when he promised to change and when he told me how much he loved me and the kids. He even started going to Alcoholics Anonymous one time.

But this time it was different. This time I felt physically sick just being in the room with him. I waited till he took the dog for a walk in the morning and then I threw the kids in the car and whatever clothes I could grab in my panic and left. I went to a Women's Shelter and then eventually I got housing with Women's Housing. It was hard. People think that you leave when you are angry and full of energy. I left when I was absolutely defeated. I had no money, no job prospects and three very traumatised children who legitimately didn't trust me to stay away. It was hard, very hard. I think I got about three counselling sessions and then I coped however I could. That was 19 years ago. I have been to University, I have travelled Australia and been to Europe twice. I work part time in a job I enjoy.

Two of my children have also completed degrees and work in professional jobs. One is currently travelling around Europe having a whale of a time, one is such a caring loving father that I want to cry every time I see him with his son. My other daughter hates me. She blames me for everything. In a way she's right. I could have done more. I could have done it sooner but at least I did it in the end and now my life is so much better than I ever dreamed it could be back then.



ABBY'S STORY

Well before he had his hands around my neck I knew I shouldn't be anywhere near this guy but it was too late to get out and I didn't know how to. I'd travelled from a country town in Victoria to Cairns with my friend, two girls not long completed high school with a van and a surf board and out to see the world. It went adrift when I teamed up with an older man perhaps double my age, Eastern European, much stronger and very definite in his views. At first he seemed nice, different and interesting but within days he became controlling and reluctant to let me out of his sight. He was possessive and dogmatic and when I disagreed over something he began to hit me. A black eye, a punch to the chest, a whack across the face and then he was so apologetic for a short time before it began again.

My friend left to travel further with good reason as I didn't seem to be available any more. But I didn't know how to leave – I felt he would get me no matter where I was and that is what he threatened. I knew I was scared and I felt very much alone. A walk along a nature reserve ended with him trying to strangle me. There was no one around and I couldn't fight or I felt sure I would die. He stopped, for whatever reason, and then he turned upon himself, tied his belt around his neck, and pulled it tight until his face was purple and his eyes wild. Then he let it go.

I wanted to leave to travel back to home. He insisted on coming against my wishes and so we journeyed back south but only to Sydney where he got out and I went on.

This whole time period was only several months. I was lucky he left and I eventually became free again. My family protected me inadvertently, but I can imagine what it must be like to have this situation ongoing and I understand the way it terrifies you but you feel powerless to get away. I can imagine how much worse it must be if you have no family to go to, or place to feel safe, or god forbid, children to protect.

I know now I needed to trust someone to help me and there are good people out there and police and domestic violence services to assist. But now I'm in my 50's and at 19 I wasn't so sure.



YASMINE'S STORY

I am from India. I came to Australia for a marriage arranged by our families. From the beginning he was very controlling. He would prevent me from talking to other people or even looking at them. He wouldn't let me have a phone of my own and the times he let me speak to my family were very few and far between and short.

I decided to leave and return to India. My family supported me but his family called me "dirty" and accused me of all kinds of terrible things. He begged me to come back. The abuse from his family in India was getting unbearable so I returned to Australia. Things were better for a while but then I got pregnant and he was furious. He tricked me and took me to an older woman in the community to have an abortion. I refused. He threw me into the furniture.

I rang a lady from church and she rang the police. They told me about the domestic violence service. I was afraid as I didn't have any support networks or friends but they were wonderful. They helped me to find accommodation, counseling and financial support.



DENISE'S STORY

I was older and realising I didn't want this anymore. I had to escape and find my own accommodation and not let him know. My self esteem was rock bottom but I felt it couldn't be worse. I was pregnant again and wanted something better for me and my baby. I realised that all those times I felt sorry for him he wasn't able to make the changes he needed and it would never stop. My hope in him got worse and my hope in me and my baby got better.



BECKY'S STORY

When I was 17 I met a much older man in a disco and fell for his charms, his age and what I thought was his sophistication and maturity. Before long I found myself in a grim domestic situation where I lived with violence, verbal abuse and disrespect. I stayed with him for three years, and covered up what was happening to me out of shame and fear and finally with the help of a male work colleague who refused to take no for an answer, I found the courage to leave.

Before I left I did a pretty good job of hiding what was happening to me. I didn't want my parents to know, I had lost most of my friends, and the odd work colleague who probably knew, turned a blind eye out of embarrassment, except for one. With his help I made it out, but that wasn't the end of it. I endured months of being followed, driven off the road, and constantly looking over my shoulder. At the end of my tether, I finally decided to ask my father for help after keeping things from him for so long. My Dad's phone call worked and I set about starting my life again, albeit a bit world weary at the tender age of 20.

These days my life is very good. I have a loving and supportive partner and family, and I've realised a dream of having a novel published about my experiences. But the slide show that plays in my head now and again, tells a story of a different girl in a different time and place, and she's hard to recognise. The one question that people ask me over again is "Why didn't you just leave?" Anyone that's been in a violent relationship will tell you that it's just as much a psychological trap as a physical one.

I was surrounded by people I could have asked for help, but I was frozen to the spot. Inside I knew I had to escape, but I couldn't work out how.

My life had been threatened on so many occasions that I believed this man would kill me if I left, or told anyone.

Someone asked me the other day what I would have made a difference to me in my situation? The difference was that one friend didn't remain silent. He pointed out the bruise on my face, he named it and shamed it, and he offered to help me. The bottom line is that if you're living with domestic violence, you need help to get out – you can't just leave – it's impossible.

So, my workmate helped me to get out, and my father made the final call, Oddly enough, my Dad only had to make that one phone call, threatening to ring the police, and I never heard from this man again. This was such an eye-opener to me - this nasty piece of work, who I was so afraid of, was happy to bash up and degrade women, but he was a gutless wonder when confronted by a man. As they say, the best disinfectant is sunlight, and, finally the light was shining in.



CELIA'S STORY

You are stronger than you know. It takes time to realise just what situation you are in. Having experienced physical violence upon my mother as a child that was what I was watching out for and that was what I avoided. For almost three decades I nurtured and gave, worked sometimes 18 hour days, gave him more money than I used weekly, cleaned the house, ironed his clothes and provided his other needs all at his convenience.

My weight ballooned from a size 14 to a size 22, and I had waking nightmares. When I spoke to him about it he just 'poo-hooed' it as female psychological fragility. What I did not realise at the time was that my subconscious was telling me to get the hell out but I thought I was going crazy and it seems he was quite happy to reinforce that idea. By the time I was 40 I was not only burnt out but seriously clinically depressed, even suicidal. Had I only stopped then to ask that fundamental question I may have realised all I had to do was walk away and build a new life for myself. But by now I was so fearful, every little thing made me nervous and my confidence was shot.

One day I woke up with the phone ringing. I was completely suicidal. Thankfully the caller realised this and came straight around. She asked me what I was going to do about it. I did nothing and life went on for another year. He was calling me names and I realised the next action from him may be he would hit me. I went to the doctor but he took his side and told me to leave.

We left the doctor's together, he trying to "groom" me into staying, as I realised he had groomed me all the time I'd known him. I was now

aware of it. When we arrived home I rang his family and told them to book and pay for his fare. I wanted him in another country. I did not want to be looking over my shoulder when we were separated. Why did I still feel scared and nervous? He'd said I would never cope, wasn't capable of taking care of myself, would still be scared and no one else would want me, I'd be vulnerable to men who would take advantage. Was he right after all? I had expected to feel relief but now all I felt was guilt and blamed myself. Enough! I walked home and packed.

Family and friends helped me with everything and within 24 hours my stuff was in a storage unit and I was at a family member's home. They treated me like royalty, before they had treated me with what felt to me like disdain. Comments flew. "It's about time you woke up", "Good on you", "Brave girl!", "We've been waiting years for you to do something for yourself". Sometimes I felt annoyed and thought why had they not helped me before then? But I realised I had to make that first step. Ten months later I was in a rented unit, on disability payments. It was humiliating. Now I was thinking I had really gone mad. I had sent myself mad by leaving him, this was my punishment. A voice bellowed in my head, "Rubbish!" I was very lucky to find a counsellor who fully understood the situation and who listened. Her guidance was non-threatening and non-interfering and at my own pace.

I enrolled at Community Sisters and never looked back. Once I started writing and drawing and making art I found myself and I found friends. Some women had suffered far worse than me in their childhood and their relationships and they were still here, sane, wonderful, caring, artistic women of substance. A good friend took me to her doctor who got me payments so I could have time to heal. I got a divorce.

I was finally free and the feeling was overwhelming. It felt like nothing bad could ever touch me again, it felt like I was capable of achieving anything I wanted. I felt like I was really alive for the first time since I married. It had taken me 27 years to wake up. 27 years I can never get back. Now it was up to me to make the rest of my life have meaning and purpose.



EBONY'S STORY

I left due to the utter disregard for my personal safety. I found another flat to live in where I wasn't known. My feeling of utter desolation meant I couldn't go back. I had hit rock bottom. Now it is wonderful to be safe and free and have a future and have chosen a future of my own.

I am poor but I am happy.



FELICITY'S STORY

The final trigger: too many repeats of putdowns; things never getting better. I don't know where I found my strength from. I went to my family and they supported me in the initial stage. After years of abuse I was determined to make it work. Maybe it was because I was older and knowing I didn't want that anymore. My baby was a good motivation. When it was over I was so happy and content. I am in a space of no pain, nothing can get to me now. I am in a happy space.



GEMMA'S STORY

When I found out what else he was doing, it became very clear to me. I had a right to protect my children and live a life free of intimidation and so did they. It was a no brainer. He has re-married and is happy and we no longer have to live in fear. I had re-educated myself and could earn my own living. That helped a lot.



KELLY'S STORY

Initially leaving wasn't easy but it is the best decision I have ever made. My friends and family found it hard to understand as I had never told them how abusive the relationship was. I found that the courses and support groups at the Domestic Violence Shelter were very helpful as I was able to talk to others who had had a similar experience and this made me feel as though I wasn't so alone.

I used to get upset and angry when I thought of how many years I had wasted with this man, but then one day I decided to be grateful that I had the rest of my life ahead of me, free of his control. I also decided to no longer see myself as a victim, but as a survivor instead. This helped me to become more positive and I began enjoying my life again.



HELEN'S STORY

My life prior to my marriage had not been easy. I had gyrated from one violent relationship to the next. Thinking that I had finally met the man of my dreams, a man whom I could trust never to abuse me physically or emotionally at the ripe age of 25 I decided to get married and make my home in Australia. The seven years of marriage were turbulent ones. With little education, skills and confidence I stayed stuck in a place that was seldom peaceful or harmonious. The betrayal of trust was painful and I eventually realized that little had or ever would change. I rang the Domestic Violence Helpline one afternoon and received counselling and advice on how to make some changes. I received assistance in every possible way.

The changes were daunting and I was at times torn between feelings of regret and relief at leaving a hopelessly violent and impossible situation. Thanks to the support I received I decided to continue my journey as a single unpartnered parent. Many nights I cried myself to sleep and was plagued by anxiety, depression and fear.

With secure housing and other forms of assistance I have been able to make positive and lasting changes. The peace and security I get from secure housing is with me every day. With assistance I have been able to surmount the challenges that face me in leaving a domestic violent situation.

I aim at becoming a social worker and am currently doing my Masters of Social Work, and with a Bachelor of Arts and a Graduate Diploma in Counselling Certificate behind me I feel confident I will be able to help others who are vulnerable and could use some support.

None of this would have been possible if I had not had the ongoing support and care that I have had. Having affordable housing that is secure has given me the wings to fly. I will always be grateful that I have been given a second chance in life.

Taking accountability for my own life and where I plan on ending up was one of the hardest and most challenging things I have ever done. I was plagued with self-doubt, and at time still am. I challenge myself every day to learn how to be assertive and examine my own life to ensure that I am never trapped in a situation like that again.

All this is done with ongoing support and counselling. Now I know that I have within the power to change the script of my life. The resources are available and I have the inner strength to continue my journey of self-awareness and independence. Of course this is never easy but if you want something badly enough anything is possible.



IDA'S STORY

I thought at 23 years old that I finally met the person I'd live with forever. After a few months I moved in and soon the verbal insults and controlling behaviours began. After I became pregnant he really began to show his controlling side. Looking back he was stripping away any feeling of self-worth I had.

Within the first year after my first child was born, he began threatening me if I left, he would get full custody. He threw stuff at me, yelled all the time, degraded me in front of our child, hit the dog and more.

A few years after we were together I went to a Domestic Violence Shelter for counselling. I got stronger and realized it wasn't me. I began to stick up for myself and he would freak out, but because I wasn't reacting the way he wanted he began going after the kids verbally. Not only was the verbal abuse increasing but a strange behaviour of intentionally getting the kids upset. For example he would go to Macca's and buy himself something and then sit there and say "this is soooooo yummy, I know you would want some, but too bad, it's all mine!" He would also sing or laugh after the verbal abuse, like he got off on it.

This last year, our 15th year together, is when I first started thinking of leaving for real. Why? Because the verbal abuse of the children and me

escalated to physical abuse. I kicked him out of the house and he moved in to our flat that we normally rent out. He now saw this as new found freedom and would come and go as he pleased and drink all night and sleep all day. He would come through the house in the afternoon, miserable and snap at us. He never helped with anything before and now it was worse. I had assumed all responsibilities for house maintenance, kids, bills, etc. If I could do all this without him, why not do it really without him.

One afternoon he came in while I was scrubbing the refrigerator and was talking to the two littlest children, 3 and 4 years old. I asked him when he was going to wake up and be a father and husband. He proceeded swearing at me, telling me I was worthless and how could anyone live with me. I locked the back door as he went outside. He came home and threatened to beat us. I waited until he walked out of the house and then went to the police station and filed a restraining order. An abuse counsellor came to the police station and helped me think of what I was going to do.

I have my moments and so do the children. It's like they are going through grief like someone has died. They are grieving for the father they hoped would get better, but now realize never will.

We will get better, it's not easy to do the un-familiar but we look forward to days with happiness, no worry or eggshells to walk on.



JENNY'S STORY

The first sign of the physical abuse started not with hitting but pushing and grabbing. First came the apologies - "I am so sorry I did not mean to grab you so hard but if you had only listened or did something right the first time we would have not had to go through that fight." As time went on the abuse got worse. He started punching and kicking and burning and cutting. I was hiding all this from people who loved me, so I had no one to turn to.

The final straw and the single most thing that changed my course with him was the day we had gone over to the neighbour's house for a barbecue and he thought I was flirting with the husband. The fight was on when we got home. There was nothing I could say or do to end this thing. I sent my sons to the shop to see if I could defuse the situation, I did not want them to see anymore then they had to. He got angrier and angrier and went for his gun. It was not the first time that a weapon had been brought in but this time I was really scared. I was right to be scared, he placed the gun in my mouth because I was lying to him and I deserved to die for that and shooting through my lying mouth made sense to him. I remember being very calm and thinking about a lot of things, was I right with God, yes, would the boys be OK, no, but in the end the only thing I could pray for was that my boys not be the ones to find me. His uncle showed up and talked him out of shooting me and I ran. I got my children and ran as far as I could.

I tell this domestic violence story not for sympathy but to point out that you never know what the one thing in your life is going to be that

changes you and everything you believe. If someone had told me I would let myself be hurt in this manner I would have laughed. I did find out that I am stronger than I thought. I also found out my children were not as blind as I thought. The biggest thing I found out was that even someone who was smart could get into a situation like this. I just want anyone who is going through this to know you can get out and be safe.

That is why I tell my story. I am no longer ashamed and if one person can find a way out because they have heard my story then it is worth all the pain to relive it. So, if you or someone you love is going through this just know you are not alone and you are stronger then you think.



LEILA'S STORY

I met him at Uni. At first he was sweet, the best boyfriend I could ask for. We were 18. The physical abuse didn't start until years later. He hated fighting. He would never be aggressive to any one, except for me. It started without reason. He'd misunderstand what I'd said. He thought I was using slang when talking about a man I'd met recently. He assumed I'd been sexual with him. He came running at me in front of our young baby. He pushed me into a corner, the baby was watching. He broke my ribs, and damaged my organs. He physically, sexually and emotionally abused me and blamed me. I actually believed him.

It was the first time anything like that had happened to me. I was scared. He kept telling me to stand up, or he'd kick me. Then he'd drag me up just to put me down again. He was much bigger than me. He pushed aside the misunderstanding and said it was my fault for even speaking to another man.

After that he watched me none stop around the clock. I'd had an operation to give birth to my baby and he would punch me where it was tender. I don't know why I didn't leave. It really did feel like it was all my fault. I couldn't go the hospital because I would have to leave my daughter there. I couldn't tell the police, there were things going on that could have made it worse with police involvement. I had every hope that he would change. I didn't tell anyone just in case they removed him from my life. I should have told him to leave from the first punch. I'd say that at the first sign of violence you should get out of that relationship. Once they hit you, they'll do it again.



PEGGY'S STORY

I got with my first proper boyfriend at the age of 17. It soon started by him not liking me talking to my friends or socializing. Maybe I was young and didn't understand what it was! But at the age of 19 I had my wonderful little boy, that's when it really kicked in! When my little boy was five days old, he threatened to kill him and me, as I didn't give him one of the bottles of milk from the hospital!

Then the hitting and kicking and verbal abuse! Making me eat out of a bin, shoving my face in ash trays, dragging me down the stairs by my hair! I used to think it was me, I'd been bad somehow, that I was being punished for something! Him knocking me out with a car battery! Being chased round the streets with a sword. Having a knife held to my throat, fearing for my life, and my little boy's.

You ask why didn't I leave? Well, I was petrified of him, I knew what he was capable of. So I took it to keep him sweet. This went on for 18 months and the abuse was daily! But one day something clicked and I went WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING!!?? So I told him it was over! He went completely mental!! Left me a message on my mum's answer phone telling me, he was going to rape me and my mum and make my little boy watch, and then kill us and cut our bodies up and set us on fire!! But I didn't give in. I stood strong. Then he got me, he kept me in the house, but I got out of his room, he then broke my nose and my collar bone.

But that day I saw what a sad little person he was: Nothing but a bully!!!



MELANIE'S STORY

I never knew what abuse was until I experienced it myself. At the beginning, I never realized it would end as a survivor's story. My three and a half year long relationship with an abuser is something I will never forget. I hope that it will help women who are in or have been in an abusive relationship.

I fell in love with a man who I thought was gorgeous. He was not rich or stable in his life but neither was I. He was so charming at first. Two weeks after I agreed to go out with him, marked the beginning of my nightmare. He began telling me where I could and couldn't go, monitoring my phone calls, but this was done in a gentle way, just telling me the flaws of my family and friends. I didn't realize he was controlling my mind at first. I have always been a strong independent woman but little by little he took control.

My first beating was after two weeks of dating. I was so embarrassed and shocked. He began threatening me and all along telling me how much he loved me. I was so attracted to him that I really thought something was wrong with me. He made me feel it was my fault. He used my past and my previous failed marriage as a tool. I began hiding bruises from my family. Lying about the ones I couldn't hide. When it was too much for me to bear, I confessed to my family and was immediately removed from my home. Then the stalking began along with the begging and pleading. I took my abuser back six times over the last almost four years. I moved five times. Had my phone number changed so many times.

I have left for the last time. I am at a new location. I also have a new number. I have a support group and have signed up to volunteer. I take

it one day at a time while still looking over my shoulder. The peace and freedom that I feel is unexplainable. If I could get through to at least one woman and help I would feel I have saved a life. It does not get better. I did everything I knew to do. I am healing and finding myself again. I am finding me!



NERIDA'S STORY

I was 20 when I first met my partner. I had a 10 month old son and as a single mother longed for a partner and loving father figure for the two of us. At first I admit I was flattered and really enjoyed having him around. I was in love before I knew it! One night he had his friends round for a meal and we all got pretty drunk. He had been in a funny mood all night and went up to bed. Five minutes later he was shouting for me to come up. I said no as I was having a good time. That's when he ran downstairs and ripped me up by my throat. The rest of that night is a blur but I remember thinking why had none of his friends stopped him. Believe it or not I am actually quite a fiery person, but for some reason I was instantly frightened of this man. Maybe looking back it was fear of losing him and being on my own again.

I had lost a lot of weight before I met him and felt the best I ever had. Yet all he did was put me down daily and in the end I just gave up. I never went out, I ended up not speaking to any of my family, put on loads of weight, and relied solely on him for company, love, friendship, and money. He had done a good job on me. I ended up staying with him for another five years having a beautiful baby boy. After about twenty hospital visits, at least ten break ups, and every day abuse I finally left.

It's been two months now. My mum got me a place to stay and one day I just got up got my two boys and left. I did have a silly moment when I started meeting him again and believing all his lies of being sorry and a changed man until after one of our meetings he asked to come back to my new place. I said no as I didn't trust him enough to know where we were living yet and he went mad! He started screaming at me and

calling me horrible names. He tried stealing my bag off of me, something he always used to do. I just couldn't believe it!

I left there and then and changed my phone number. I just hope he will leave us alone. I really, really loved this man and never ever wanted to end it. I still wake up in the middle of the night pining for him, but I know I have to do this for me and my boys. I cry all the time, but I have to do this and I will.

I just hope someone reads this and I give them the strength to do the same. Nobody deserves to be treated like that. I don't think I will love anyone as I do him but now I'd rather just be on my own. In the years to come what will be will be!



QUEENIE'S STORY

I'd not come across another soul in my network inside or outside of church, that seemed to have a real awareness of the grip of domestic violence. I was trying to make sense of what I was experiencing – vulnerable. It was detrimental to my emotional and mental survival to deliberately expose myself to overpowering and debilitating well-meaning but ignorant comments or advice. So I closed my shutters around these experiences when with people and trusted, talked to, communed with the Only One I knew could – Jesus.

I have a depth of gratitude, camaraderie and indebtedness to Jesus that has come through relating to Him through the darkness of domestic violence. I have an intimacy with and a reliance on my Lord because of my unwanted and hideous circumstances. He faithfully and lovingly walked in my shoes with me, helping me to forgive along the way, releasing me from bitterness, lifting me to freedom when I was ready, and giving me purpose amongst it all.

He offers perfect empathy, is helping me uncover the truth, releasing me from debilitating false guilt, validating me as a valued child of God and imploring me to do the same for others.

I thank God for His abundant joy despite my pain and for using me to advocate for and walk alongside other isolated women, breaking the silence and dispelling myths about domestic violence within the church.

*The threshing floors shall be full of wheat,
And the vats shall overflow with new wine and oil,
So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten,
The crawling locust,
The consuming locust,
And the chewing locust,
My great army which I sent amongst you.
You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied,
And praise the name of the Lord your God,
Who has dealt wondrously with you;
And my people shall never be put to shame.
(Joel 2:24-26) NKJV*